

CLASSIC TOUCH

NARENDRA KUSNUR

IN his newspaper columns, musicologist Mohan Nadkarni has always combined a deep understanding and knowledge of Indian classical music with frank and forthright opinions. These characteristics are again evident in his book *The Great Masters: Profiles in Hindustani Classical Vocal Music*.

As the title indicates, the book personal experiences and interviews with chronological details. Despite the typographical errors that regularly creep in here and there, the book should really impress anybody who's been keenly following Indian classical music. While there are vivid profiles of some of the greatest 20th century vocalists, one finds rare photographs, many of which have been culled from Nadkarni's personal collection.

Before getting on to the profiles, Nadkarni describes the various styles of Hindustani singing - like the dhrupad, dhamar, khayal, thumri, tarana and tappa. Then, he traces the individual characteristics of vocal schools like Gwalior, Agra, Atrauli-Jaipur, Kirana, Patiala, Mewati and Rampur-Sahaswan. In this section, he highlights the work of pioneering doyens like Haddu Khan, Hassu

Khan, Alladiya Khan, Abdul Karim Khan and Inayat Hussain Khan.

Nadkarni has some absorbing tales to tell about Gwalior parampara maestros Ramakrishnabuvu Vaze and K S Pandit, Agra gharana great Faiyaz Khan, and renowned musicologists Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and V N Bhatkhande.

While talking about the legendary Sawai Gandharva, the author laments the fact that present-day listeners refer to him mainly as the guru of Gangubai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi and Firoz Dastur. In other chapters, he talks about the much-publicised rivalry between doyennes Kesarbai Kerkar and Mogubai Kurdikar. His interviews of Begum Akhtar also make for interesting reading.

Nadkarni comes up with an apt analysis of the vocal styles of the Dagar family members, Amir Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Omkarnath Thakur, Mallikurjun Mansur, Kumar Gandharva, Gangubai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi, Kishori Amonkar, Pandit Jasraj and Shobha Gurtu.

While referring to Joshi, for instance, he talks of the times when he was rather erratic in his singing. Then, he adds: "Yet there was no

diminution in his popularity. He had built up a permanent audience of his own. To such an audience, nothing mattered once Bhimsen came on the platform."

Then, in the chapter on Amonkar, he writes: "It has been said, quite aptly, that it is the artiste's eccentricities, volatile temper, peevish conduct and outward show of arrogance that serve to provide a clue to his or her prodigious talent and sensitive temperament. If ever there is one musician whom this description would seem to apply in full measure, it is Kishori Amonkar."

While the book carefully enlists the older generation of artistes, one wishes there were a few chapters on currently-popular musicians like Parveen Sultana, Rashid Khan, Rajan-Sajan Mishra, Veena Sahasrabudhe and Malini Rajurkar.

For classical aficionados, of course, this is a collector's volume. With his attention to detail and ability to cater to the reader's interest, Nadkarni comes up with an extremely readable book.

***The Great Masters: Profiles in Hindustani Classical Vocal Music*, by Mohan Nadkarni, Harper-Collins Publishers India, pp 453, Rs 500.**

